THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

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To all our Society members and friends, we extend best wishes for a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a very HAPPY NEW YEAR!

As we go to press, preparations are under way for the Society party on December 12th. From all indications, it is shaping up into a full-scale "bash" and there should be a goodly crowd on hand at the Red Carpet Saloon. In the next issue of the Newsletter we will feature a write-up and photo coverage of the event.

As we announced in the November issue (and wish to emphasize again now), your 1965 membership is now up for renewal. A gratifying number of people have already taken advantage of our special offer to renew before the end of December at the old rate of $2.00; after that, the increased rate of $3.00 will go into effect.

PRAIRIE RAGTIME BY TOM SHEA

To those who have ordered RSR#2 -- please accept our apologies for the delay in shipping your orders. There was a holdup in the printing of the album covers, but this has been overcome and RSR#2 was mailed to you on or before November 15th.

REPRINT CLUB

Membership in the Reprint Club has increased to the point where we can now guarantee members 15 numbers (instead of 14) for their $10.00 fee. From now on, it will act somewhat like a chain letter or pyramid club -- for each new member who joins, we will be able to increase the guaranteed minimum number of reprints by one, so that everyone benefits. New members receive all back reprints, of course.

PERFORMERS

Max Morath dropped us a note telling of his whereabouts: "While I'm still playing some single dates, I am moving more and more toward fulltime involvement with the Original Rag Quartet, the group I formed last summer for the Village Vanguard (New York) engagement."

The Quartet played a number of college dates this Fall, including five dates for regional conferences of the Association of College Unions, where several hundred colleges and universities are represented.

Max says that "Epic will release a single '45' by us in mid-November -- 'My Gal is a High Born Lady' backed by 'Dill Pickles' -- and we are working on an album for release after January 1st."

Rags in the Quartet's repertoire include Cascades, Euphonic Sounds, Heliotrope Bouquet, Grace and Beauty, Slippery Elm, Original Rags, etc;

vocals include Cubanola Glide, Ain't That a Shame, Mr. Johnson, Hello My Baby, etc.

Max also mentions a forthcoming book of rag songs being prepared by none other than Ann Charters and due for release in the Spring by Ochs Publishing Co.

Max asks whether we have heard the new ABC-Paramount album, "This is Ragtime Now" by Hank Jones: "I haven't heard it yet but saw a review.* Jones, as you probably know, is one of the top pianists in the business -- but has not previously been associated with rag, to my knowledge. The review I read does not list any titles except Lamb's 'Bohemia', but says Joplin, Scott, etc, are represented. Also, an original by Jones and one by arranger Manny Albam -- one of the best arrangers in the business. Hope you'll review this. It sounds great, and especially significant, I think, in that it proves that playing rag need not be limited to specialists -- a limitation that I have always felt cut drastically into the potential output of good recordings of various approaches to ragtime."

*We missed the review Max refers to, but did see a very enthusiastic one in the December issue of Playboy. We intend to review this album for members as soon as it is available. Ed.

Whenever Charlie Rasch sends us a note, he usually includes a pen-and-ink sketch. This one shows Ragtime Charlie and Sister Kate in action at the Old Heidelberg, Ann Arbor.

BOOK REVIEW

Although the following is a letter from Bob McGrath of Bellerose, N.Y., it has the qualities of a book review, and we present it as such:

"I noticed in one of the Newsletters there was mention made of the early ragtime bands and orchestras. Recently I have been reading a book called 'Jazz - New Orleans 1885-1963' by Samuel B. Charters.

"This book is very informative about the early beginnings of jazz and about the bands and musicians of that time. Of course I suppose these would be considered more or less jazz bands. The fact brought out in the Society Newsletter (Karl Kramer's letter, September issue) was that most bands of the early ragtime era could not play ragtime well, or seemed to jazz it up too much, yet this book mentions many interesting things. Buddy Bolden was considered a ragged player and was a legend. In fact, most of the bands were considered ragtime bands.

"It also mentions that the Downtown Creoles, who were readers, were highly skilled musicians, while the Uptown, newly freed colored race were improvisers who played in the district and were unskilled in the way of reading music. Eventually both races were forced to play together because of the lack of bookings. Possibly this may account for the beginnings of jazz.

"There is also a recently televised series on Channel 13, WATV, in New York about New Orleans jazz which I would say seems to support this theory. Some of the old musicians, when asked whether they felt they were ragtime bands rather than jazz bands, answered yes -- both colored and white.

"I've read that jazz was an accidental invention, just emphasized by the record companies, which in reality was nothing more than the small improvisations and embellishments of the musicians. Of course, Willie the Lion Smith says something else in his book 'Music on My Mind' which just came out recently. I would think that one could never really get to a conclusive answer about this.

"Getting back to why early bands or orchestras could or could not play ragtime, I think possibly they played more on a showy or commercial basis. They had to play the way the public wanted them to play. What if Scott Joplin or James Scott formed a ragtime band or orchestra? What about Fred Stone's Orchestra or some of the other Negro bands? How did they play? I would surely say that many instruments are adaptable to playing ragtime with as much perfection as the piano.

"For those who are interested, there is an old colored piano player at Tobin's (a new place), 3rd Avenue and 26th Street in Manhattan, who was supposed to have played a lot of Joplin rags at one time. Since they are no longer popular, he doesn't bother playing them any more. How about a few ragtime fans encouraging him? His name is Hank Duncan and he plays with a colored banjo player; he is a friend of Cliff Jackson (a Harlem stride piano player) who plays New Orleans Dixieland with Tony Parenti at Ryan's in New York. For more New Orleans music there is Wilbur de Paris at the Broken Drum on 2nd Avenue and 80th Street."

-Bob McGrath

COMPOSERS

Gil Lieberknecht of Omaha, Nebraska, sent us an original composition titled "Silver Hawks Rag". This is an interesting 100-bar number, written in a minor vein; Gil's explanation of what inspired the rag is equally interesting:

"'Silver Hawks' was taken from a water-ski club of the same name in Omaha. The composition is my musical expression of the intricacies of water-skiing.

"The first strain sets the general mood of the serious type of highly competitive water-skiing. The second strain is an attempt at a musical description of trick skiing in which the skier does a number of turns (i.e., sometimes skiing backwards). The third strain or trio is a musical description of jumping and the last strain is descriptive of slalom-skiing when a skier will at first cut one way around a buoy and then the other.

"Though I belong to another ski club, I did learn a lot of skiing from a good friend who is a member of the Silver Hawks, and the experience then inspired (?) me to write the music."

VIEWPOINT

In response to our record review in the September issue, Jay Bain of Petoskey, Michigan, writes:

"I was certainly shocked by your rude criticism of 'Ragtime Classics' by Wally Rose. I sometimes wonder whether you are helping or hindering the very few ragtime performers left in this country. I know of no one piano player who has done more for ragtime over a long period of time than Wally Rose. I am sure Wally had his good reasons for making the album as it was. For one thing, at the time the album first came out there was very little interest in ragtime at all. I think Wally was trying to revive interest for as many people as possible in a subtle way. Why don't you pick out the good numbers in the album like Top Liner Rag, Gladiolus, Euphonic Sounds, Easy Winners, and The Cascades, and who else can play The Pearls, Frog Legs Rag or Pineapple Rag? You can hear Wally play strong, biting ragtime in Lu Watters' albums. Why try to take the bread out of his mouth now?"

Thank you for your comments, Jay. We would point out that the purpose of our reviews is to present moderately objective criticisms of records for the guidance of Newsletter readers. Not all reviews can be favorable, of course, and not all readers will agree with our opinions.

Possibly this month's review of Knocky Parker's albums will spark some further reaction among readers; if so, let's hear about it -- we are happy to receive and publish criticisms of our criticisms.

RECORD REVIEW

Knocky Parker's "Complete Works" Albums: Scott Joplin and James Scott; Audiophile Records

When a pianist sits down to record the complete works of a prolific composer like Joplin or Scott, a certain sameness of sound is almost inevitable. On these albums, unfortunately, it assumes ho-hum proportions.

There are a number of contributing factors, chief of which is the blandness of Knocky's playing. Dr. Parker has developed what must be one of the most delicately restrained styles in the business, and restraint is hardly an ingredient of ragtime. While his micrometer-precise touch is something to marvel at, it is done to death; his left hand in particular is consistently understated -- so much so, in fact, that it almost completely robs Knocky's playing of the fire and drive normally associated with the music. Even his little bursts of emotion seem to come through in pastel colors. (On 'Stoptime', where the performer usually cuts loose with a good lusty bash at the floor, Knocky sounds as if he's patting the rug with his bare foot.)

This is by no means intended as a blanket condemnation of Dr. Parker's playing; considering it purely as ragtime, however, the faults considerably outweigh the virtues. Perhaps Knocky's greatest single fault is that he fails so badly to excite the listener, either positively or negatively. Only twice was this reviewer aroused -- once to smile at 'Stoptime' as noted, and once to frown rather severely at how the very beautiful 'Pleasant Moments' had been denatured.

Knocky sounds essentially like a cocktail pianist playing a gently swinging, softly spoken and daintily arranged brand of ragtime. The end result is certainly inoffensive, but it is likely to be somewhat unnerving for those who think of ragtime in more robust terms.

While these albums may not shine as ragtime performances, they do catalog the seventy-odd works of Joplin and Scott, including their lesser-known marches and waltzes. For this reason alone, many enthusiasts will value Dr. Parker's obvious labor of love as an authoritative reference source.

-Bob Ashforth

THE LOCAL SCENE

About the only place in Toronto where you can hear real classic ragtime these days is at the Last Chance Saloon. Society member Johnny Arpin, who is an A-1 pianist, will play on request rags by Joplin, Scott and Lamb, plus a good selection of Morton stomps. John accompanies Bonnie Roberts (also a Society member) who sings numbers from the Ragtime Era and the Roaring Twenties. They are on from 5 to 9 p.m., and John usually plays one or two solo sets during the evening. Drop in and say hello.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK:

Henri Parisot writes that he has completed the translation of "Mister Jelly Roll", by Alan Lomax (into French), and that it has now been published by Les Editions Flammarion of Paris.

Vincent Terbois of 40 Servette, Geneva, Switzerland, would like to exchange information on music, tapes, records and so on with other members.

Although we keep telling ourselves that we are doing a service, it is when we receive letters which start as the one below that we think we are on the right track: "I've just received your list of publications, and am very delighted by them and also most grateful to you. I really had despaired of buying sheet music of ragtime, and this is the most exciting news I've had in my piano playing career." Peter Turner, Derbyshire.

Many of you have written asking where you may obtain the LP "When Grandma Was a Teenager". This record is published by the Vintage Jazz Music Society, 32 Kenton Lane, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, England. The price is reputed to be 36/ postpaid, which would break down to about $5.40. Tell them we sent you.

Robert McCreight of Lima, Ohio, has written us offering to any member who would like to have it, a copy of "Russian Rag" on a 78 rpm platter. Bob says the copy he has is serial no. 18743-B, and is a piano and accordian version which he believes was recorded in 1903-4. Bob can be reached at 128 S. McDonel, Lima, Ohio.

Brian Bulgin writes: "Please send a few Society cards. I intend seeing that one is secreted between the pages of the copy of They All Played Ragtime that reposes (permanently, it seems) on the shelves of the local public library." Seems like an excellent suggestion to us, and we would be glad to hear from anyone else who might like to do likewise.

On page 73 of our last issue we forgot to mention that Peter Lundberg of Goteborg had his composition "Hippocampus Two-Step" included in Max Morath's new folio "Guide to Ragtime".

Ragtime Rod Pringle, 20240 Gratiot Rd., Merrill, Michigan, writes that in addition to playing and composing ragtime, he cuts his own compositions on his own roll perforator. He also does custom perforating, and handles player pianos.